

Remarks at Branch Notification Night
5 November 2006

Good evening, General Stephenson, distinguished guests, friends and members of the Class of 2007, and welcome to tonight's ceremony.

Before we get started, I just want to quell the rumors you have heard about the branching numbers from DA. Yes, we received everything we asked for – **1,006 infantry slots**. It made it very easy to buy brass this year!

Seriously, this ceremony marks another significant moment in your cadet experience and your life. It brings you closer to your goal of graduation and commissioning. I want to congratulate each of you on reaching this milestone and the choices you have made. Savor this moment because it also marks a new identification and a new beginning for you.

As you put on your branch brass, others will no longer identify you as simply a cadet. You will be an artilleryman, MP, aviator, engineer, or a transporter. Your selected branch was so important to you that 156 of you, 15% of your class, participated the Branch for Service program and extended your commitment to eight years in order to get your branch. That's a good deal for you and for the Army. There's another one coming up in a few weeks, when you have the opportunity to sign up for the Grad School for Service option. For those of you who have an eye towards grad school in the future, this is a great way to get into a top school and let the Army pay for it.

Regardless of your choices, you now have your branch of service, and with this new distinction comes additional responsibilities. You will be expected to become technically and tactically competent in your branch, and to continue to grow in your knowledge and skills as you progress in grade and responsibility. You will be expected to understand how your branch fits into the Army's combined arms team. Even though you each will wear a different branch

insignia, remember that the strength of the United States Army – the greatest army in the world – lies in the synergy of all its branches and components. It lies in the combined arms team.

In my first meeting with you this summer, I told you that you are members of the most trusted profession in America, more so than Supreme Court justices, doctors, and leaders of organized religions. The reason is now because of what you do, but because of why you do it and how you do it. The nature of today's fight, in the Long War on Terror, underscores the necessity for excellence in fundamental tasks and for even the most junior leaders to be able to switch easily between the roles of the Army Pentathlete. But for these five roles, what you do will pale in comparison to how you do it. You must be many things, but first and foremost, you must be a commissioned leader of character.

This Thursday, we will celebrate Veterans' Day – a day when Americans pay homage to veterans of all services who have served their country in peace and in war. As a group, your legacy will be that you are not solely tankers or quartermasters or signallers, but that you are American Soldiers. I challenge each and every one of you to be the best Soldier in your branch – to serve as a leader of character for our nation throughout your career, and to burnish the great legacies that are the American Soldier and the Long Gray Line.

Finally, I would like to thank Mr. Joel Jebb, on behalf of West Point's Association of Graduates, and MG Stephenson, representing the Class of '57, for their generous donations this year of your branch insignias and presentation cards which you will shortly receive and also thank the Class of '57 for their support of the Class of '07 over the past three years – they have been with you every step of the way, providing your class flag at Buckner, the coins at your Affirmation Ceremony last year, and for your Ring Weekend reception in August. '57 has been with you every step of the way, and I encourage you to continue this association into the future.

And now, the moment you have been waiting for, when you find out how you will serve your Soldiers and your nation. Class of 2007, you may now open your envelopes.